

XLIII.—*On a case of a Cuckoo and a Swallow being reared in the same Nest.* By the Rev. CHARLES WOLLEY-DOD.

EDGE HALL is twelve miles south of Chester, and in its garden small birds have a good time, as cats and bird-nesting boys are carefully prohibited. Their worst enemies appear to be Jays, which hunt for their nests early, before anyone is about, and carry off the young birds. Nevertheless, the numbers of Pied Wagtails, Spotted Flycatchers, and Swallows seem yearly to increase. The garden is a favourite resort for Cuckoos, and a young Cuckoo generally occupies at least one of the Wagtail's nests, and appears on the lawn in due time, waited upon by the old birds. I have often watched to see whether more than one pair of birds took part in the feeding, but I never could make out that it was so.

About midsummer this year my gardener came to tell me that he had found a young Cuckoo dead in a Wagtail's nest, built in a wall close to the back door of my house. He passed the nest at least a dozen times a day, and had missed seeing the old birds within twenty-four hours. I found the young Cuckoo, about a week old, and of course the sole occupant of the nest. It was plump, and bore no outward sign of injury, and had not been dead many hours. My man was sure that the Wagtails had learnt wisdom by experience, and that when they found what it was they were rearing they had deserted it. But this was rather slender evidence of desertion, and this young bird's fate must remain a mystery. About two days later, it was on the morning of the twenty-second of June, my gardener told me that there was a young Cuckoo in a Swallow's nest in the potting-shed. The "coin of vantage" chosen by these particular Swallows to build in must be fully described in order to understand what follows. The potting-shed, about thirty feet long and eight wide, is a lean-to shed outside the wall of the kitchen garden, with another cross-wall at one end. The other end and half the side on which it is entered are boarded or glazed, leaving open about fifteen feet in length and six in height. The eaves of the iron roof rest upon a horizontal beam, which makes a

sort of ledge inside, between which and the roof is a wedge-shaped cavity, convenient for keeping trowels, hammers, &c., which are held in the angle of the wedge. Amongst other things, the gardener had put there a thin bit of board, just where a rafter comes down and crosses the horizontal beam. On this board, projecting and resting on one side against the rafter, the Swallows had built their nest, two-thirds of which were blocked at the sides and back, and there was access to it only by the concave channel of the corrugated iron roof, which afforded a space of about two inches between the nest and the roof for about one third of its circumference. I do not think it would be possible for a Cuckoo to have got into the nest to lay an egg; how the young bird was intended to get out when full-grown was another difficult problem. However, there the young Cuckoo was, and I judged it to be about a week old; I took it out of the nest to examine it, and it was lively and vigorous, its feathers beginning to grow.

On inquiry I found that about a week before this two broken Swallow's eggs had been noticed beneath the nest. I believe these were afterwards removed by the old Swallows, because I found one of them dropped on the other side of the wall against which the shed leans, and the gardener had not touched the broken eggs; as the Swallows continued to visit the nest he had not thought anything of the incident. I also learnt that about a month before the garden-boy had come upon a Cuckoo sitting on a box in the shed. It flew away, but two hours afterwards was there again. Later in the day I felt in the nest again and discovered that besides the young Cuckoo there were two young Swallows, evidently hatched later, and apparently three or four days younger. I watched for some time to see whether the Cuckoo would make any attempt to eject his companions, but he did not seem to notice them. The next morning I took the nest down to examine it. There was only one young Swallow, the other had disappeared; I suspect it had died and the old birds had carried it away, for I could see no disposition at all in the Cuckoo to interfere with the survivor, which seemed weakly and starved.

On that day, June 23rd, I put another piece of board by the side of the first in the wedge of the roof, and on it I lodged an empty Blackbird's nest, in which I placed the young Cuckoo, leaving the Swallow in its own nest. When the old birds next came, they sat upon a box which hung against the wall just opposite their nest, inside the shed. After twittering there for about ten minutes and taking a survey of the new nest they flew off and returned with food six times in half an hour. I think they fed only the Cuckoo in the Blackbird's nest, neglecting their own nest and progeny. Later in the day, as the little Swallow seemed to be getting cold and starved, I put it with the Cuckoo into the Blackbird's nest. From that time I took down this nest every time I wanted to look at the birds, and replaced it on the board.

The two nestlings lived peaceably together, and both got fed and grew. The Swallow generally had its head visible from under the rear of the Cuckoo's wing. The Cuckoo after a day or two began to resent being touched or looked at, rising up in the nest and making threatening demonstrations, drawing back his head and striking with his beak. His rate of growth was astonishing. I often sat in the corner of the shed and watched the parent birds. When they first saw me there, they generally went and sat up on their favourite box opposite the nest, the first waiting for the arrival of the other, and they appeared on that visit to swallow the food they had brought in their mouths. They then went off together, and one or other came about once in two minutes, flying at once to the nest, though I could not then distinguish which of the two young ones was fed at each visit. The droppings were all carried away from the ledge by the old birds in their beaks, and let fall at some distance from the nest. In one of my inspections I dropped a white feather with which the Swallow's nest had been lined, and at its next visit the old bird picked it up from the ground and carried it away. This made me think that the broken eggs had been removed in the same way.

On the 28th we had a garden-party, and many visitors went

to see the infant prodigy, which was now feathered all over and very fierce, rising up and drawing himself back so as to get a good strike at the intruders. He quite filled the nest, and besides pecking savagely, he opened his wings and stamped his feet about, apparently not from any ill-will to his foster-brother, who, however, did not seem to like such rough behaviour.

On coming the next morning my gardener found that the Blackbird's nest, which had been carelessly replaced on the narrow lath, had fallen six feet to the ground and was lying bottom upwards. The Cuckoo was sitting by the side of it, but the Swallow was beneath it; neither seemed any the worse. A broader piece of board was substituted, and a prop put on each side of the nest, as the Cuckoo now often stood up, and, being big and heavy, might easily overbalance it. Twice on that day I found four Swallows in the shed, and, as there was no other nest there in use, I wondered whether the additional pair had been called in to help in the feeding; it did not prove to be so; still I think their presence was not accidental, but that they had been invited in by the parent birds.

The feedings now became more frequent, and I counted seven visits in ten minutes; both young ones were making satisfactory progress, the Cuckoo always fluttering and striking when approached or handled, but the little Swallow remaining quiet and crouching in the bottom of the nest; it sometimes tried to avoid being trampled upon by clinging to the inside of the nest, with its head over the edge, but it had a rough time of it.

At 9 o'clock in the evening of the 2nd of July, and about the same time on one or two subsequent days, when Swallows had ceased to fly, the old birds were not at the nest or in the shed, and I still wonder where they passed the night. The young Swallow, however, was at that time uppermost in the nest, lying on the Cuckoo's wing, and if there had been any disposition to eject him it could have been done with the greatest ease. The two little Swallows first found, or rather the eggs which produced them, had probably been saved from

ejection by the closeness of the iron roof to the top of the nest, but when they were changed to the Blackbird's nest, and it was placed farther away from the eaves, there was plenty of head-room. However, from first to last the Cuckoo showed no hostility to the little Swallow, though it several times pecked at the parents whilst feeding their own baby.

On the 3rd of July the Cuckoo left the nest and sat in the dark angle behind it. I could now watch the old birds feed both the young ones, and they were beginning to be more attentive to their own. The Cuckoo remained out all that day—greatly, no doubt, to the relief of his companion—but the next morning was in the nest again. He was now nearly full-grown and full-fledged, and, fearing he would trample the Swallow to death, I put it into the original nest, which I put back to nearly its original place, so as to be safe from the invasion of the Cuckoo. This time, so far from neglecting it, the old birds found it and fed it at once; it competed with its companion for their attention, twittering whenever they came with food, whilst the Cuckoo had for some days begun his querulous little squeaking chirp, which was now almost incessant.

About 4 in the afternoon of July 5th the Cuckoo, which had been in and out of the nest several times, stepped upon one of the props which I had put to support the nest and overbalanced it. The prop fell to the ground with a great rattle, but the Cuckoo, with much fluttering, recovered himself. The old birds, both of whom were present, at once showed signs of the wildest alarm; they flew round and round, in and out of the shed, screaming, and dashing at the Cuckoo, whom, I believe they no longer recognized as the nestling they had reared, but took for a Hawk which had just made away with one of their young ones. Anyhow, they fed him no more, but avoided him and approached their own chick by a circuitous route. The Cuckoo now flew from one part of the shed to another, continuing his squeaking note, but the Swallows avoided him, or only made threatening dashes at him. Next morning he was sitting on a fruit-tree outside the shed; but still the Swallows

avoided him, and the alarm was taken up by other Swallows, who mobbed him as they do a Hawk; he flew first into a wellingtonia, followed by a dozen Swallows, then back again over the shed into a large oak, where he sat forty feet up, still followed by screaming Swallows. Soon after he flew down into the kitchen garden, where Blackbirds and Thrushes became noisy and surrounded him, the Thrushes staring inquisitively, the Blackbirds settling above on the wall and keeping up that note of warning which they always raise against a suspected intruder. After that he came and sat upon a garden frame, opposite his native shed, where I was observing the parent birds, and I had an opportunity of watching what took place at a distance of three or four yards. The two old Swallows made frequent dashes at him, approaching first in front and then in the rear, and turning off when within three or four inches of him, making him start every time. (Certain pairs of Swallows in my garden always year after year assail me in the same way if I pass near their nest, coming so close to my face that I can often feel the waft of their wings, and making an audible snap with their beaks when at the nearest point.) From time to time one would fly into the shed and go up to the nest as if to satisfy itself that its remaining little one was still safe. After half an hour of this I felt some compassion for the young Cuckoo, and, catching two or three insects, I went to feed him; but he would not let me come close, but again flew about fifty yards into a clump of thinly furnished spruce, where he sat on a branch about twelve feet from the ground, uttering his querulous chirp incessantly. The Blackbirds discovered him and became noisy again. It was now nearly 1 o'clock and I left him, and never saw him afterwards. I went round the garden to search for it two or three times that afternoon and the next day, and though I should easily have recognized his note, even if the birds had not attracted me by their excitement, I could not find him, nor did my gardener, who was constantly about, see anything of him; whether, when he found that it did not answer to pose as a starving beggar, he determined to work for a livelihood and succeeded, I cannot tell. He

was quite strong and at home on the wing, skimming confidently during his flight, like an old bird, and he might easily have found food, if his instinct taught him how to look for it. There seems to be some uncertainty as to the age at which a young Cuckoo begins to provide for himself, but it is not easy to see what useful experience he gains by watching Wagtails run about the grass coursing flies, or Swallows hawking them in the air; but as long as I saw him he showed no disposition to look for food himself, nor did any bird show any inclination to help him.

As for the young Swallow, the old birds now devoted all their attention to it. For the rest of that day, and the two days which followed, one or both of them were always near the shed, and I am sure that they troubled themselves no more about the monster from the care and fear of which they were now released. The 7th and 8th of July were very stormy, and the young bird sat for most of the time on the edge of the nest, twittering to his parents, who spent much of the day on the box opposite to him; he seemed as well feathered and nearly as big as they were. The morning of the 9th was calm and bright, and when I went to look at the nest at 7 o'clock the young Swallow had flown.

XLIV.—*Remarks on some recently described Extinct Birds of Queensland**. By R. LYDEKKER.

IN the four communications cited below, together with an earlier one relating to a bone belonging to the *Dinornithide*, Mr. De Vis has described a number of bird-remains from the superficial deposits of Queensland which are referred to upwards of 27 distinct species. Eight of these are assigned

* C. W. DE VIS. A Glimpse of the Post-Tertiary Avifauna of Queensland. *Proc. Linn. Soc. N. S. W.* (2) iii. p. 1277 (1888).

——. On the Trail of an Extinct Bird. *Ibid.* vi. p. 117 (1891).

——. Note on an Extinct Eagle. *Ibid.* vi. p. 123 (1891).

——. Residue of the Extinct Birds of Queensland as yet Detected. *Ibid.* vi. p. 437 (1892).